



NACOP NOTES

May 2009

Message from the Co-Chairs

By: Drusilla Fratesi, MSA
Diona Austill, NPA
Pat Berry, Ex Officio

Spring – Some definitions include resilient or elastic force; to take an upward course; to be released from a constrained position; the season of the year characterized by the budding of trees, growth of plants, the onset of warmer weather, etc. These definitions indicate growth and forward movement. At this time of year, motivation to move forward is naturally all around us as the season develops. It is a time for starting over in the gardens, for “spring” cleaning, for renewed outdoor activities as the weather warms. Similarly, it can be a motivational time for us in the workplace. Let us each be challenged to use the outside forces evident at this time of year as motivation to “spring forward” in ways to improve our work and our workplace.



NACOP – National Advisory Council for Office Professionals

<http://www.npstaf.ars.usda.gov/nacop/index.htm>

2008 ARS Office Professional of the Year



Melissa Alegria, Office Automation Clerk at the ARS Southern Regional Research Center (SRRRC) in New Orleans, LA, has been selected as the 2008 “ARS Office Professional of the Year.” Ms. Alegria works with procurement and property in the Administrative Office at SRRRC, and, despite a title

that seems routine, her responsibilities have been described as anything but routine.

Ms. Alegria is cited in the nomination for enhancing and organizing the duties and responsibilities of the Contracting Officer and the Property Officer when the duties were consolidated under one person. She was responsible for improving the property duties, clarifying the process, and consolidating the filing system. When it was necessary to begin maintaining Real Property files at that location, Ms. Alegria initiated a filing system and worked closely with the Area Property Office and O&M Contractor to assure accuracy of documentation. She has initiated a Personal Property accountability system and was responsible for the Personal Property Disposition form that was commended in the recent CARE Team review.

Ms. Alegria has volunteered to be the back-up person for every position in her office and is known for her willingness to accommodate and assist beyond necessity, sometimes irrespective of her own deadlines or the fact that she is on her lunch break. Her high degree of organization, attention to detail, performance efficiency and expertise in public relations establish a

good working relationship with a diverse group of stakeholders and the varied units supported by the Administrative Office.

Not one to ring her own bell, Ms Alegria does not look for accolades, does what she does for her own fulfillment, and tries to assure that the mission is met.



Pacific West Area (PWA) Office Support Advisory Council

Contributed by Deb Penick/Melanie Wilson/Stefani Morgan

Initially named the Pacific West Area (PWA) Secretarial Advisory Council, and established in 1995, the Council was developed to open and enhance communications between secretaries throughout PWA. The Council established contacts at each location for distributing information to all secretaries. At the first meeting of the newly-formed Council, a charter was developed and sent to all PWA secretaries. Officers were elected and projects were selected for members. The group provided information regarding the use of working titles and established a resource assistant list.

The mission of the Pacific West Area Office Support Advisory Council (PWA OSAC) is to provide tools to ensure that the Pacific West Area has highly skilled office support staff to meet the research goals of the Agency. Our goal is to strengthen and improve the professional image of all PWA office support staff through orientation, training, and networking. The Council works to improve communication, awareness, and skills among office support staff, strengthen programs and opportunities for their career development and enhancement, and provide advice and recommendations on Agency and PWA policies and programs related to the employment, development, and advancement of office support staff.

PWA OSAC has recently initiated monthly Office Support Personnel conference calls to encourage and facilitate networking, identification of issues, determination of resources, and sharing of ideas and

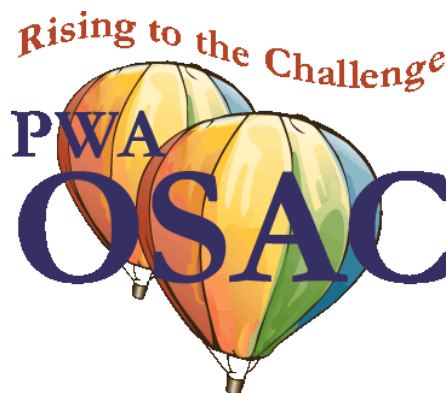
She believes that the best way to make work (and life) better is through personal example. She is, indeed, deserving of this award, presented to her by ARS Administrator Dr. Edward B. Knippling at the annual Awards Ceremony in February.

Congratulations, Melissa!

information. The calls are designed to be relevant, timely, and informative without negatively impacting work time. Agenda subjects will target areas that location personnel identify for assistance and/or clarification.

Some of the accomplishments of the council are:

- Established a “Buddy System” to mentor new office support personnel - PWA OSAC’s mentoring program has been emulated by PWA AOs and RLs.
- Contacted individual support employees by Council members to promote the Council’s mission, encourage participation and application to be a Council member.
- Provide up-to-date, informative website to assist area office support personnel to enhance skills and abilities with current Agency processes and programs.
- Designed a Welcome Packet which is sent to PWA new hires to introduce the Council and to provide initial resource assistance.
- Create and implement an annual activity to recognize all PWA office support personnel during observance of Administrative Professionals Week.



Office Organization Tips

Contributed by Sandra A. Groneberg.

- Place tomorrow's top priority task at the center of your desk before you leave work today. You'll start your day focused.
- Schedule appointments and meetings with both beginning and ending times. People are more "to-the-point" when they are up against a deadline.
- Complete a phone call; then write down your next action relating to the call in your planner. Do you need to make another call or mail something? If you can't do it now, document what needs to be done and when.
- Do similar activities in the same block of time (i.e. return all phone calls at one time, respond to emails only at two or three specific times during the day, and do all errands in one trip).
- Designate a space in your office for items that need to go home with you. Do the same at home.
- Streamline supplies in your desk drawers. Keep only what you will realistically use during the next month.
- Clear your desk top of all personal mementos. Hang them on the walls, place them on shelves, but give yourself space to work at your desk, without distractions.
- Simplify a big project by writing down everything. Then, put the tasks in order. Next, set up a time line. Finally, delegate as much as possible.
- Make your work day afternoon more productive by leaving the office during lunch time. Energize yourself by breathing some fresh air. Take a walk. Get away from your desk.
- Spend five minutes a day on something you have been procrastinating. Usually, once you start, you probably won't stop after just five minutes, and you will make progress.

Informative Links on Area Council's Websites

Northern Plains Area Council of Office Professionals Website www.ars.usda.gov/npa/npacop

Best things on our website:

- **Quick Reference Guide** updated 2/1/2009 <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Services/docs.htm?docid=16209> Our Quick Reference Guide has 30 chapters. You should be able to find anything you need to know or at least a person to contact by going to this link.
- Our **Welcome Packet** is also on our website. It has a list of several different directories, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Services/docs.htm?docid=16417>
- Also, we have a **Reminder Calendar** that was just updated – it is great to keep you on track each month! http://www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/ad_hoc/54000000NPASAC/QuickReferenceGuide/Chapter29.pdf

Midwest Area Program Administrative Support Task Group Website www.arsnet.usda.gov/pastg

- A comprehensive list of **SOPs** compiled by the Midwest Area, with easily-accessible links for functions performed by Secretaries and Program Support Assistants. <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/pastg/sop/index.html>

Southern Plains Area Advisory Council for Office Professionals Website

- <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/acop/>



GRAMMAR Repair Shop

Sentence Fragments

Fragments are incomplete sentences. Usually, fragments are pieces of sentences that have become disconnected from the main clause. One of the easiest ways to correct them is to remove the period between the fragment and the main clause. Other kinds of punctuation may be needed for the newly combined sentence.

Below are some examples with the fragments shown in **red**. Punctuation and/or words added to make corrections are highlighted in **blue**. Notice that the fragment is frequently a dependent clause or long phrase that follows the main clause.

- *Fragment:* Purdue offers many majors in engineering. **Such as electrical, chemical, and industrial engineering.**
Possible Revision: Purdue offers many majors in engineering, **such as electrical, chemical, and industrial engineering.**
- *Fragment:* Coach Dietz exemplified this behavior by walking off the field in the middle of a game. **Leaving her team at a time when we needed her.**
Possible Revision: Coach Dietz exemplified this behavior by walking off the field in the middle of a game, **leaving her team at a time when we needed her.**
- *Fragment:* I need to find a new roommate. **Because the one I have now isn't working out too well.**
Possible Revision: I need to find a new roommate **because the one I have now isn't working out too well.**
- *Fragment:* The current city policy on housing is incomplete as it stands. **Which is why we believe the proposed amendments should be passed.**
Possible Revision: **Because** the current city policy on housing is incomplete as it stands, we believe the proposed amendments should be passed.

You may have noticed that newspaper and magazine journalists often use a dependent clause as a separate sentence when it follows clearly from the preceding main clause, as in the last example above. This is a conventional journalistic practice, often used for emphasis. For academic writing and other more formal

writing situations, however, you should avoid such journalistic fragment sentences.

Some fragments are not clearly pieces of sentences that have been left unattached to the main clause; they are written as main clauses but lack a subject or main verb.

No main verb

- *Fragment:* **A story with deep thoughts and emotions.**
Possible Revisions:
 - *Direct object:* **She told** a story with deep thoughts and emotions.
 - *Appositive:* **Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper,"** a story with deep thoughts and emotions, **has impressed critics for decades.**
- *Fragment:* **Toys of all kinds thrown everywhere.**
Possible Revisions:
 - *Complete verb:* Toys of all kinds **were** thrown everywhere.
 - *Direct object:* **They found** toys of all kinds thrown everywhere.
- *Fragment:* **A record of accomplishment beginning when you were first hired.**
Possible Revisions:
 - *Direct object:* **I've noticed** a record of accomplishment beginning when you were first hired
 - *Main verb:* A record of accomplishment **began** when you were first hired.

No Subject

- *Fragment:* **With the ultimate effect of all advertising is to sell the product.**
Possible Revisions:
 - *Remove preposition:* **The ultimate effect of all advertising is to sell the product.**
- *Fragment:* **By paying too much attention to polls can make a political leader unwilling to propose innovative policies.**
Possible Revisions:
 - *Remove preposition:* **Paying too much attention to polls can make a political leader unwilling to propose innovative policies.**
- *Fragment:* **For doing freelance work for a competitor got Phil fired.**
Possible Revisions:
 - *Remove preposition:* **Doing freelance work for a competitor got Phil fired.**
 - *Rearrange:* **Phil got fired** for doing freelance work for a competitor.

These last three examples of fragments with no subjects are also known as mixed constructions, that is, sentences constructed out of mixed parts. They start one way (often with a long prepositional phrase) but end with a regular predicate. Usually the object of the preposition (often a gerund, as in the last two examples) is intended as the subject of the sentence, so removing the preposition at the beginning is usually the easiest way to edit such errors.

Taken from the Writing Lab, Owl at Purdue, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. Last edited by Allen Brizee on December 17, 2007.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/620/01/>



The National President's Challenge (formerly called HealthierFeds) is a 12-week physical activity challenge designed to get America up and moving. The Challenge will run *May 1, 2009 to July 24, 2009*. The purpose is to encourage Americans to integrate some form of physical activity into their daily lives. All employees, including their family members are encouraged to participate. For more information, please view the attached 2009 National President's Challenge Fact Sheet. You may also visit the following web site for ideas how to get active, and to use the body mass index calculator and the activity log.

<http://www.presidentschallenge.org/>

In an effort to promote a healthier workplace for USDA, employees are being asked to register under **Group ID Number: 54443** and **Group ID Name: Department of Agriculture**. You may also register individually or start your own group within your unit, branch, division, among family members, and/or other social organizations. *Registration begins May 1, 2009 through May 29, 2009*. Please click the following link to register http://www.presidentschallenge.org/login/register_individual.aspx.

For additional information regarding other work/life programs, please contact Tonya Morris, REE Work/Life Program Manager on 301-504-1489 or via e-mail tonya.morris@ars.usda.gov.